

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
News Clips
Thursday, 21 April 2011

MARCELLUS SHALE/NATURAL GAS DRILLING

“Gas Well Spews Polluted Water”

April 21, 2011

New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/21/us/21frack.html>

ALLENTOWN, Pa. (AP) — A blowout at a natural gas well in rural northern Pennsylvania spilled thousands of gallons of chemical-laced water on Wednesday, contaminating a stream and forcing the evacuation of seven families who live nearby as crews struggled to stop the gusher.

The Chesapeake Energy Corporation lost control of the well site near Canton, in Bradford County, around 11:45 p.m. Tuesday, officials said. Tainted water continued to flow Wednesday afternoon, though workers finally managed to prevent any more of it from reaching the stream.

No injuries were reported, and there was no explosion or fire.

Chesapeake said a piece of equipment failed late Tuesday while the well was being hydraulically fractured, or fracked. In the fracking process, millions of gallons of water, along with chemical additives and sand, are injected at high pressure down the well bore to break up the shale and release the gas.

State environmental regulators were taking water samples from the tributary of Towanda Creek, which is stocked with trout.

The blowout comes amid a natural gas drilling boom in the Marcellus Shale formation.

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“Both sides frustrate judge in drilling suit”

Amy Worden

April 21, 2011

Philadelphia Inquirer

<http://www.philly.com/philly/news/120340039.html>

HARRISBURG - Nowhere has the battle over drilling for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale been uglier than in the rural community of Dimock (pop. 1,400) in the far northeast corner of the state.

Last year in Dimock, a gun was pulled on an employee of Houston-based Cabot Oil & Gas, prompting the company to send its crews out with armed escorts.

It wasn't exactly the shootout at the O.K. Corral, but on Wednesday, some of that vitriol spilled over into a federal courtroom here.

A group of Dimock residents is suing Cabot over alleged contamination of their wells, claiming people are suffering health problems from chemicals in their drinking water. Methane gas was part of the controversy. Some Dimock residents found they could set their tap water on fire.

Last year, Cabot was ordered by the state Department of Environmental Protection to halt drilling in the area after numerous regulatory violations. For now, drilling around Dimock has ceased.

So why did the plaintiffs rush into federal court seeking an injunction to stop drilling in the area? That's what U.S. District Judge John E. Jones 3d wanted to know.

"Why couldn't someone just say, 'We're not going to drill'?" Jones asked Cabot attorney Walter A. Bunt Jr. "We're in a knife fight here."

Bunt offered no explanation.

"Did you check with DEP?" Jones asked the plaintiffs. "I'm not DEP."

Steven Berman, an attorney with the firm Napoli, Bern, Ripka, representing the plaintiffs, acknowledged he had not checked with the state, but proceeded with requesting the injunction on the advice of his clients.

"They told us that [drilling] work was under way," he said.

Jones suggested that the attorneys were "burning up" their clients' money and wasting the court's time.

"I shouldn't be bogged down by this," he said.

But the tirade went on.

"Your comments do nothing but give me a sense of hopelessness in this litigation," Jones said. "I can't construct a mechanism to make you become more collegial."

His parting message from the bench: Keep behaving this way, and sanctions will be imposed.

In less than 20 minutes, it was over.

Injunction denied.